

The Home of the Bulgarian



BULGARIAN
DIPLOMATIC
REVIEW

SUPPLEMENT TO ISSUE 9, YEAR 3

ISSN 1311-9273



9 771311 927003 > 9.99 EUR/
19.95 BGL

THE HOME OF THE BULGARIAN



**BULGARIAN
DIPLOMATIC
REVIEW**

Why the Bulgarian, despite his traditional poorness, has always pinched and scraped to build himself a house, as solid and as durable as possible

The lifestyle of a people is moulded above all by their way of life, and this in turn is to a great extent determined by the type of dwellings they live in. Since ancient times the dwelling has given man the right of life, way of existence and possibility for reproduction. The dwelling sheltered him at night and safeguarded him from enemies. He rested there after the day's toil and also raised his children there. The more one is attached to the land on which he lives, the more solid and fortified are the houses he builds. To defend his right of life!

Again for the purpose of defence and support, back in the time of primitive communism the villages emerged after gathering together the dwellings of whole families, tribes, and later of heterogeneous groups of people. Historically this process is conditioned by the development of agriculture and the transition to a more settled way of life. The town originated as a result of the deepening of the social division of labour, when the crafts moved away from agriculture and commodity exchange came into being. Therefore, villages and towns are historical categories, and their emergence reflects the nature of the social relations. Thus the population engaged in tilling the land, stock-breeding and production of agricultural products concentrated in the villages, while the ruling class, and the intelligentsia and the craftsmen, as an intermediary class, concentrated in the towns.

The contemporary Bulgarian people was basically formed during 6–9 c. AD after the merging of three different peoples – Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians. The Thracians were the local population, while the Slavs and the Bulgarians settled in the present-day Bulgarian lands in the 5–7 c. AD during the Great Migration of Peoples. Thus formed, the Bulgarian ethnos started on its hard road of development, marked by bright periods of upsurge and prosperity, but also by dark ages of decline and foreign slavery. Under all conditions, however, it preserved its originality, enriched its culture, strengthened its inner bond, and created its own ethnic history, at first popular, then national.

The remnants of solid dwellings found at the site of ancient settlements of Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians, unambiguously prove the strong aspiration of these three peoples for settled life even at the time

of their separate existence. And when for some reason (in the quest of new, more fertile land or fleeing from a stronger invader) our ancestors had to abandon their old homes, right after they settled at a new place they started building their new homes. Even more solid and better fortified. This desire to “strike root” is materialised particularly strongly after the foundation of the Bulgarian state in 681 AD and continues throughout the 1300 years of its development. It is still alive today. Building and defending their homes, sacrificing themselves in the name of their children's life, the Bulgarians have been building up a state to remain in this place forever and ever.

Any foreigner visiting Bulgaria finds it hard to understand why the Bulgarian, despite his traditional poorness, has always pinched and scraped to build himself a house. Or buy an apartment. And today he still does it, even though there is a lot of uninhabited housing in the villages and small towns. And why in our country there are so many proprietary dwellings per capita, and mostly school and university students live in rented lodgings. And why the so widely spread in the world prefabricated wooden houses, much cheaper than the monolithic, are not popular in our lands. Even though they are built within days and meet the latest standards of habitation. Bulgarians like to say: “his is a cottage, not a house!” That is, a temporary structure, it does not provide security and guarantee for the future of its inhabitants.

Statistics not only does not give answers to these questions but even aggravates them, because the results from the 2001 census of the Bulgarians and their property are the following:

1. The total population of Bulgaria as of that year is a little over 7,930,000.
2. Of the total of 3,350,000 dwellings in the country 2,810,000 or 84% are inhabited.
3. Uninhabited are 14% of the town and 20% of the village dwellings.
4. Of the inhabited dwellings 91% are private and only 9% are rented, or there is one inhabited private dwelling to every three persons.

Yet, the Bulgarian continues to build dwellings!?

Only by going back to the roots of the Bulgarian civilisation can we find the answers to the above questions. They are hidden in the building traditions of

the ancient Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians of the time when these lived separately in different parts of the world. These traditions, amalgamated and mutually complemented after the merging of the three peoples, flourished during the First and Second Bulgarian States and did not die out during the Byzantine and Turkish domination. Continually enriched and improved with the achievements of the neighbouring peoples, they shine gloriously in the masterpieces of the National Revival Period preserved to this day. The buildings constructed after the Liberation from Turkish domination till the Second World War are in no way inferior to the best European samples of the time. In the period 1944–1990, although with disputable ways and means of realisation, the mass housing construction to a great extent satisfied the age-old lust of the Bulgarian to have his own home.

Going over the whole Bulgarian history we come to the present-day when all modern achievements of the world art of building are added to this tradition. Through the centuries the Bulgarian built his home with enviable mastership and furnished it with exquisite taste and love. He was urged by his proverbial industriousness and genetically inherited sense of beauty, but most of all by his devotion to the family hearth.

Bulgarians are the kind of people who do not close up and isolate themselves within their state but thirstily absorb and further develop the ideas, culture and technologies of the other peoples with whom they come in contact and who, at a given stage, were more advanced. Ancient Bulgarians were lucky to live along the borders of great civilisations – China, India, Persia, Byzantium, and draw lavishly on their experience in all fields of life.

The desire to adopt and develop anything valuable and progressive from the culture of other peoples was also present in the Thracians and Slavs. It is not accidental that later they would find many things in common and would establish a unified state with the Bulgarians. This is particularly evident in the development of their art of building. Archaeological finds eloquently speak of the fact that the Thracians built their towns in a similar way as the best antique examples, although they did not even have their own writing. The Slavs, settling in the Balkan Peninsula quickly adopted the building traditions of the Thracians and started using stone as a more durable building material and almost without objections accepted the model for a Slav-Bulgarian state proposed by the Bulgarians.

Bulgarian architecture borrowed but only the best of the art of building of its neighbours, without literally copying foreign types. During the First and

Second Bulgarian States, builders remained faithful to many of the old architectural traditions, which endowed their buildings with a pronounced original character. This is valid in the utmost degree for housing construction. As we shall see later, the type and layout of the traditional dwelling will slowly change, but through the centuries the tendency to settled life will remain permanent.

If the old Bulgarians fortified mainly their towns, under the influence of Byzantium there was a growing tendency to reinforce the individual dwellings by the use of more durable materials such as stone.

Some may object that this concerned above all the palaces and not the popular dwellings. But when the tsar and the noblemen fortified their homes – the palaces, they actually consolidated the state. This means they intended to rule this people and this state in this place and for a long time. Thus gradually the domicile turned into a state. And the surrounding states had to reckon with it.

The history of the development of Bulgarian culture, material culture in particular, part of which is architecture, may be divided in two main periods: before the 14th c. and after the 14th c.

Bulgarian architecture until the 14th c.

The first period in the development of the Bulgarian architecture has three main stages:

- The first stage covers the time when Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians developed separately. Then the houses, farm and cult buildings were of the simplest plan and construction. They were built with materials offered by nature in an almost finished form.

- The second stage covers the epoch of the First Bulgarian State (681–1018). The founding of this



Pastade house.

state, which had to wage many wars to ensure its existence, also determined the character of Bulgarian building in this epoch. The state needed strong defences, and the early-feudal gentility headed by the Khan's court wanted stately monumental palaces and churches. And while the fortifications and throne palaces in layout, construction and building material were made after the model of local Roman or early Byzantine fortresses and palaces, the construction of residential buildings in this stage of development was based mainly on the old traditions of the Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians.

– The third stage of this period of development of architecture in Bulgaria covers the time of the Second Bulgarian State (1185-1396) when feudal relations were most advanced. And as the latter were identical in the whole Balkan Peninsula, many of the military, civil and church buildings in Bulgaria, Byzantium, Macedonia and Serbia are of nearly the same kind and construction.

It was in this period, when the state was established, that the traditions were established too.

The ancient Thracians

The Thracians as a distinct people are mentioned for the first time in the written sources of the 13th c. BC in connection with their participation in the Trojan War as allies of the Trojans. But the objects found during the excavations of an ancient necropolis outside Varna, dated 5–4 millennium BC, show that along



Starosel

with the first civilisations in Asia Minor, the valleys of Tigris and Euphrates, Palestine and Egypt, in our lands originated the civilisation of the Thracians. It was the Thracians who created the first advanced civilisation in Europe. The Greek historian Herodotus (5th c. BC) wrote that the Thracians were the most numerous people (at the time) in Europe, and in the world – second after the Indians.

As a result of the intensive development of the productive forces and increasing complexity of pro-



Starosel

And all these fortifications were done only to allow these people to remain in these lands despite the incessant attempts of near and distant neighbours to drive them away or subordinate them.

A ruler would not double fortify his dwelling unless he wanted he and his heirs to rule here forever!

The palace, like the other houses found in Sevtopol, had quarry rock foundations and the superstructure was of a wooden skeleton filled in with adobe. The roof construction was wooden, covered with flat and curved tiles.

The Slavs appeared to the south of the Danube in the beginning of the 5th c. and in some hundred years they took over the entire Balkan Peninsula. The blond new-comers quickly assimilated the already sparse Thracian population.



The traditional dwelling of the Slavs was the semi-dug-out of square or rectangular form, dug in the ground about 70 cm to 1 m deep. The aboveground part was made of a wooden skeleton and walls of wattle and daub. The roof was wooden, covered with leaves, hay or fern.

As already mentioned, when the Slavs crossed the Danube and settled in the lands of the age-old Thracian civilisation, they quickly learned how to use stone as a building material, as only a durable building material guarantees security and creates conditions for permanent settlement at a place.

The Bulgarians and “Great Bulgaria”

Late 20th c. research of Armenian and Indian sources clearly shows that at least from the 7th c. BC the Bulgarians populated the plains to the west and north of Pamir. These are the fertile fields of present-day northern Afghanistan. In antiquity this area was called Balhara, i.e. Bulgaria. According to the same sources, the Bulgarians were Indo-Europeans of Iranian race and language group. Being numerous, the Bulgarian tribes moved towards Europe in three conspicuous waves between the 2nd and 4th c. and, despite their heavy losses, they founded two power-



Tower of the palace near the village of Bolgari, Chuvash



ful states - near the Volga and near the Danube. There is written evidence that as early as the beginning of the 4th c. some Bulgarian tribes crossed the Caucasus ridge and settled permanently in Armenia. Others settled along the lower reaches of the Donets, Don, and the Sea of Azov coast, some of them going as far as Panonia, the plains round the Carpathians and even to northern Italy.

In 632 Khan Kubrat proclaimed the foundation of the Bulgarian state, uniting all Bulgarian tribes to the Danube on the west, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov on the south, the river of Kuban on the east, and the river of Donets on the north. The capital was the town of Fanagoria, at the Sea of Azov. Later Byzantine chroniclers would call it "Great Bulgaria" with respect. It was not just a military-tribal union, but a state of strictly defined territory, state administration, laws valid for all subjects, and its own foreign policy. The credit for this goes to Kubrat himself, who spent twenty-two years of his childhood in Constantinople, the capital of European civilisation at the time. There he obtained high education and knowledge of the building and functioning of a state mechanism. There he also adopted the Christian faith.

When scientific works say that in their land of origin the Bulgarians were nomads, it does not mean they lived on horseback and in carts always on the way to somewhere. Nomadity is a scientific term which means a mode of production of peoples whose main means of living is stock-breeding. The nomads also have permanent settlements where they only spend the winter however – during the other three seasons the men and the older children are constantly on the move with the herds in the tribe's territory in search of pasture.

Therefore the original form of settlement life were the nomad bivouacs. These were set out over a comparatively large territory in the steppe areas near river banks. At that time the main type of dwelling was the yurta. Yurtas were cone- or dome-shaped tents made of leather. In the centre stood the fireplace, and a hole in the apex let out the smoke. A mixed type of dwelling was the semi-yurta – semi-dug-out, slightly dug in the ground. This was definitely Slav influence on the Bulgarians.

The second type of settlements were the auls, where 20-30 families lived. These nomad bivouacs for spending the winter gradually turned into permanent settlements. The emergence of permanent settlements was related to the tendency to settle. In the course of time, the fortified settlements turned into stone fortresses.

In their new domicile in the northern Black Sea plains and Crimea, the Bulgarians broke away with the





Air view of the Palace complex in Pliska

nomad way of life. They settled here for 300 years and built large cities and fortresses. Archaeological excavations in these parts show beyond doubt that a significant part of the Bulgarian population started cultivating the land, sowing and harvesting. Armenian historians wrote with amazement that to the north of the Caucasus only the Bulgarians have stone cities. The discovered remnants of aboveground wattle-and-daub and stone dwellings are evidence of high-level economic life of the already permanently settled Old Bulgarian population.

In the nearly 700 years since the Bulgarian people left the territory of present-day northern Afghanistan, it made immense progress. Some achievements, like the performance of complex skull surgery or the making of the amazingly exact calendar, older than even the Chinese, evoke admiration even today.

Khan Asparuh and foundation of the First Bulgarian State

After the death of Khan Kubrat in 651 the Chazars conquered the territory of Great Bulgaria in Ciscaucasia, in the basins of the Kuban and Don rivers and the Crimean peninsula. Part of the Bulgarian tribes acknowledged their rule, but most of them were forced to leave these lands. Some of them withdrew far north where they set up Volosh-Kam Bulgaria which existed until the 13th c.

An important role for the existence of present-day Bulgaria at its present-day location played Kubrat's son – Khan Asparuh. About 670 AD he reigned over the territory between Dnepr, the Danube and Donets. Realising that in this marshy and infertile land he cannot provide good life to his people, in 680 Khan Asparuh transferred a large part of the Bulgarian army and population to the south of the Danube delta, in present-day Dobrudja. The aim of the expansion was to take over the lands of ancient Mizia, which attracted the Bulgarians with the fact that they were naturally protected by the high-water Danube on the north, the Balkan Range on the south, and the Black Sea on the east. In essence, this act constituted a declaration of war on the Byzantine Empire.

At that time Mizia and the whole peninsula had already for a century been populated with numerous Slav tribes who assimilated the local Thracian population. The common threat of Byzantium forced the Bulgarians and Slavs to conclude an agreement, under which the Slav tribes from Mizia acknowledged their subordination to the Bulgarian state.

In 680 the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV

Pogonat organised a great march to chase away the Bulgarians beyond the river Danube. Despite its large numerical superiority, his army was defeated and pursuing it the Bulgarians seized the whole Byzantine territory between the Danube and Stara Planina (the Balkan Range). In 681 the battles moved to Thrace. So, the same year, to stop the series of defeats Byzantium signed a peace treaty with Bulgaria, which was the first international recognition of the new Bulgarian state.

Once the Bulgarians, Slavs and Thracians liked the Balkan peninsula as a place for setting up their state, they had to take up the building of a complex system of defences against enemy attacks. The first task was to fortify and safeguard the ruler's palaces.

Byzantine writers called these fortified palaces auls. The first Bulgarian capital – Pliska was such an aul. The general fortification system of the city included an earth fortification, representing a rectangle of area 23 sq. km outlined by a moat and earthwork, called the outer city, and a citadel – the inner city, surrounded by stone walls 10 m high and 2.60 m thick, made of big regularly dressed blocks cemented with red mortar. The inner city was amply supplied with water by clay water-pipes.

Inside the citadel were the Khan's residence, the Throne Chamber, pagan temples and boyars' houses. The Khan's palace was also built of stone blocks, fixed with red mortar and iron brackets. Slabstone covered the floor in the whole residence and fine stucco covered the beautiful megalithic masonry. There was a heating installation under the floor and on the walls.

The existence of an outer and inner stronghold shows that there was social differentiation among the population of the capital. Excavations in the outer city uncovered remnants of semi-dug-outs, as well as of rectangular stone buildings made of quarry stone.

In the reign of Tsar Simeon the fort of the second Bulgarian capital – Preslav was built in a similar way. Only here both walls were of stone. The royal palace is not preserved but we have the Bulgarian 10th century writer Yoan Exarch's description of the houses in Preslav. He wrote that on the outside they were decorated with stone, studded with wood and painted, and on the inside they were decorated with marble and copper, silver and gold and the famous Preslav painted ceramics.

The Balkan peninsula has always been part of the Mediterranean world, where the traditions of stone masonry flourished since ancient times. Very widely spread was the free-stone masonry with clay filling. At some places horizontal or vertical beams were built in.



Ruins of Preslav

Judging from the archaeological excavations in Pliska, Preslav and other places in north-eastern Bulgaria and preserved written sources, apart from stone, bricks were also used for the main structure. The roof was tiled or covered with lead plates, the flooring was of marble, slate, bricks or cement. The walls had marble lining or fine plaster, and the architectural decoration included capitals, cornices, painted ceramics, imported glass, etc. On the upper floors there was usually a veranda.

Of course, in those times this was the way of building and fortifying the royal palaces and the houses of boyars and wealthy people from the ruling class. And this was natural, as in this way the existence of the state was guaranteed. The people continued to live in their traditional yurtas and dug-outs.

Actually, the dug-out proved a very resistant and suitable form of dwelling in the harsh climatic conditions of northern Bulgaria, where it occurred until the beginning of the 20-th c. as the so-called dug-in house.

The transition from yurtas and dug-outs to above-ground houses was gradual. Intermediary forms of permanent dwellings have been found, built of stakes and wattle-and-daub as the dug-out but on the earth surface as the yurta. Under the influence of Byzantine culture, stone masonry was introduced in the houses of even the ordinary Bulgarians. Thus excavations in Dobrudja of dug-outs dating back to the 8-9 c. found not only walls cut in the earth but also stone-faced walls. This tendency would gradually prevail in housing construction in the following centuries.

Bulgaria under Byzantine domination

In 1018 Bulgaria fell under the domination of Byzantium. With the destruction of the secular and

church aristocracy, the development of Bulgarian spiritual and material culture was brought to a standstill for 167 years. But in this period, for the needs of the Byzantine rulers, there was an extensive construction of fortresses in the Bulgarian lands. Fortresses were also built by individual feudal lords in the desire to isolate themselves as independent masters of their land. The fortresses guarded the chief fortification lines – the Danube and the Rhodope Mountains. A string of forts were also built on the Balkan Range. One of them was the Turnovo fortress which became the stronghold of the liberators of Bulgaria, the brothers Asen and Petar.

The works of Idrisi provide the most extensive information about the Bulgarian cities of the 11–12 c. He wrote, for instance, that “Sredets had populous quarters and numerous buildings, Kostur and Plovdiv were populous and rich towns, Shumen, Vidin and Svishtov were fine, populous and flourishing towns, and Drastar was known for its crowded marketplaces and diversity of occupations”.

The building technology of the fortifications and of

Baba Vida fortress, air view



the major public buildings was different from that in Pliska and Preslav. Instead of large ashlar blocks now they used quarry stone or small ashlar blocks with a filling in-between and white mortar cementation. To reinforce the walls wooden grilles of crosswise and longitudinal beams were often built in, which replaced a few courses of brickwork.

There is scarce information about the type and character of residential buildings in the Bulgarian lands during the 11–12 c. Under the influence of Byzantine architecture in the cities mainly stone houses were built with mortar or mud cementation. The upper floors of some of them were built of stakes and wattle and daub. Remnants of such buildings of the Byzantine period were found on the hill of Tsarevets in Turnovo.

Second Bulgarian State

In 1186 the Bulgarian people gained its liberation from Byzantine domination. In the following period – 12th to 14th c. – the Bulgarian material and spiritual culture experienced a new upsurge. Some pre-renaissance elements were already evident. In the field of construction, under the strong influence of Byzantium the so-called “Bulgarian school of Byzantine-style architecture” was created.

Having just liberated itself from oppression, the Second Bulgarian State had an even greater need of forts. The medieval fortresses (called “grada” in Old Bulgarian) in contrast with those of the 9th or 10th c., were built on steep high hills, naturally protected by cliffs and rivers. Such places were hard to reach by the siege machines of invaders and could be

Turnovgrad, Tsarevets with the main gate and the patriarchal church



defended by a comparatively smaller army.

Town development complied not only with the general town-planning principles of the feudal town, but also with certain local traditions and peculiarities. In most cases there was a clear distinction between the two basic parts of town: the fortress or "inner city", which was situated at a high and difficult of access place, and the subtown or "outer city", surrounding the fortress. The latter part was also fortified wholly or at the more vulnerable places. The towns were supplied with water by wells or large reservoirs.

The ruling class lived in palaces and castles. In contrast to some European countries, the castles of the Bulgarian boyars were inside the towns and not outside the forts. This fact is explained with the specificity of Bulgarian feudalism where the boyars were

administrative governors of the cities and their districts.

The best preserved Bulgarian medieval castle is the castle in Vidin now known as Baba Vida. Built on the foundations of earlier buildings, during feudalism it took the form of a fortified castle, where premises were set in a row along the fortified walls and opened on to a spacious courtyard. Rising high with its powerful stone body, the castle inspired fear in the feudatory population and respect in the enemies.

Turnovgrad was developing as a typical feudal city. Already under the first Asen tsars it became the major political, as well as cultural and spiritual centre of the country. Not in vain did contemporaries call it "Tsarevgrad Turnov" and "Great town Turnov". It was situated on three strongly fortified hills – Tsarevets,



Turnovgrad, the Small Gate of Tsarevets



Turnovgrad

Trapezitsa and Momina Krepost rising steeply above the winding river Yantra.

The hill of Tsarevets was best fortified. Three gates in a row and a lifting bridge before the first gate led into town. Inside, at the hill ridge, the palace of the Tsar rose, and higher up was the Patriarch's residence and the patriarchal church "Christ's Ascension". The hill of Trapezitsa also had fortified walls and was densely built up with houses and churches.

One of the most imposing monuments of civil architecture of the time was the palace of the Bulgarian tsars, occupying an area of nearly 5000 sq. m. Surrounded by high walls, in its construction it represented a fortified feudal castle, equipped for self-dependent defence and long siege.

Next to the royal palace in Turnovgrad the foundations of a large boyar house were uncovered, which had been a two-storey building with three rooms in a chain horizontal plan on each floor. In the middle of the upper floor there was a spacious veranda. The royal palace also had such big verandas at the upper

floors.

The houses of the wealthy citizens (the petty boyars) were built at the foot of Tsarevets and Trapezitsa in the so-called "new city", also strongly fortified, today known as Asen's neighbourhood. Until the earthquake of 1913 there stood three houses from the time of the Second Bulgarian State. Two of them were entirely of stone, and the third one had a frame-built upper floor and a large open porch. The entrance on the ground floor was a two-wing arched door. The windows on both floors were little, some with semicircular curves formed with pieces of free-stone. That these houses had belonged to the Turnovo boyar class was evident from the fact that a heraldic sign, placed under a boyar's name, was found in the ground floor of one of them. Comparative analysis showed that it was these fortified boyar houses of the 12th-14th c. that served as basis for the fortified houses in Arbanassy and Bansko, notwithstanding their significant modifications in later times.

On Tsarevets remnants were also found of houses

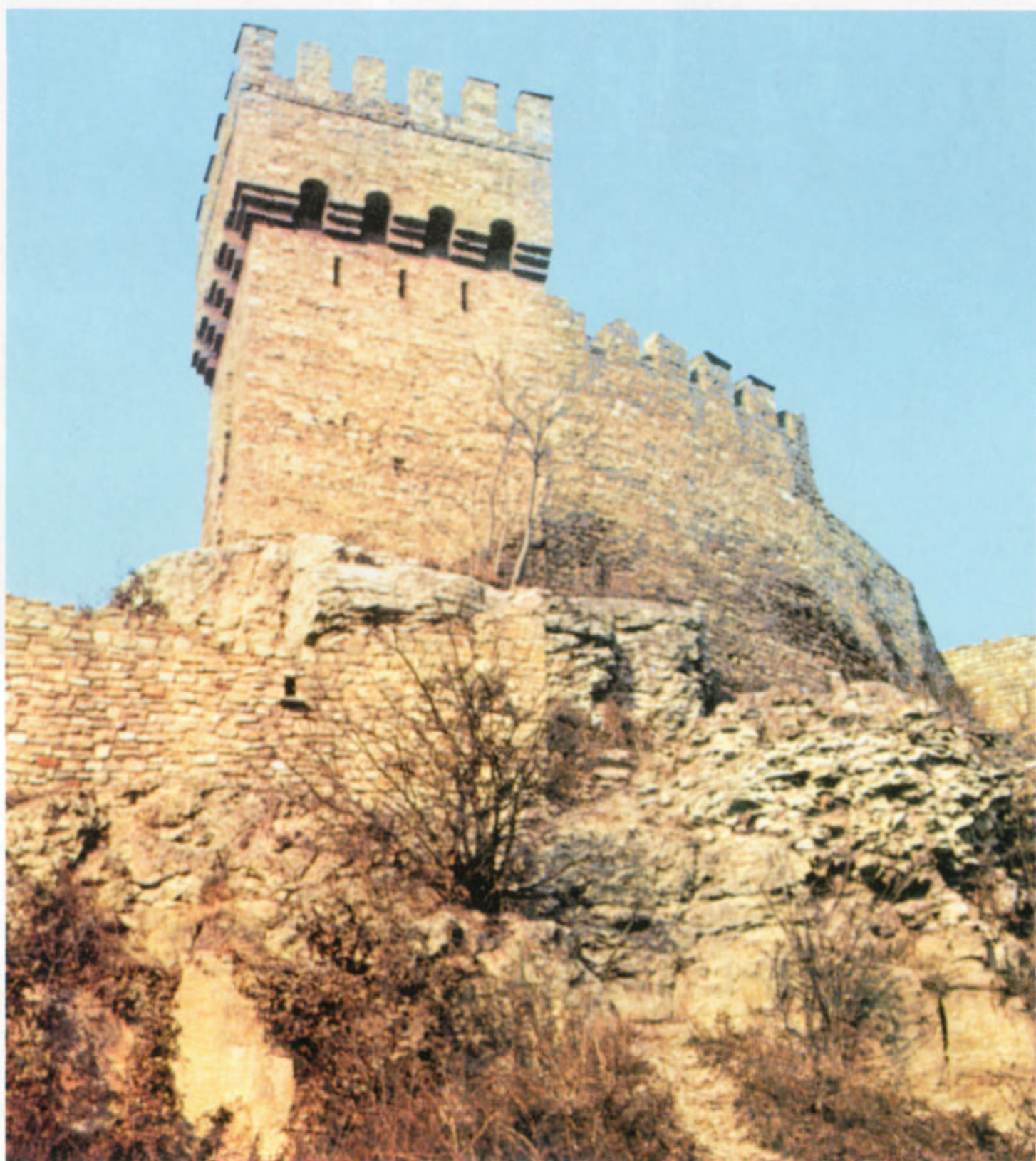
of ordinary citizens, built close to one another to save space. Most of them comprised two rooms. They were built of quarry rock fixed with mud, and the upper floors were made of wood or wattle and daub. Some of them had tiled roofs.

The houses of poorer citizens found at the outskirts of Trapezitsa and Momina Krepost were predominantly half-dug in the earth. Above ground these semi-dug-outs had quarry rock walls cemented with mud or outside walls of wattle-and-daub. Inside they were revetted or panelled. This type of dwelling was spread mainly in the villages. The semi-dug-out tradition, as already pointed out, was preserved for many centuries at some places in the Danube plain.

The ruins of houses so different in style and building material shows the great differentiation in social and material status of the various classes of the Bulgarian population. Typical for the historical period of Great Turnovo was the feudal stratification of the state. The importance of the nobility grew and a tendency to



Turnovgrad, a boyar's house shot by L. Filipov before the earthquake in 1913



*Turnovgrad,
Baldwin's Tower on
Tsarevets*

separatism emerged. Architecture was differentiated according to the needs of the “great” and “petty” boyars. Many boyars, such as protosebast Hrelyo, had houses, workshops and stores in town and fortified castles and towers on their landed estates.

The construction of boyars’ fortified houses went in parallel with the construction of palaces and fortresses. Archaeological traces of this kind of buildings lead either to the capital city (as the above-mentioned Asen’s neighbourhood in Turnovo), or to fortified settlements, or to fortresses in naturally protected spots near the feudal lord’s possessions.

That is why ruins of a stately medieval house were also found in Melnik. The house was almost completely preserved until the beginning of the 20th c. It

had been the home of some local city notable. It was a three-storey house with a large vestibule on the second floor. The rooms opening on to the vestibule were set in a row along the walls. The house was built of squared stone surrounded by the so-called “cellular masonry”. The windows were small, with semicircular curves in their upper end made of radially arranged bricks.

A solid medieval residential building with interior decoration was also found in the centre of Sofia.



Veliko Turnovo

Bulgarian architecture after the 14th c.

The second period of development of the Bulgarian architecture, and more specifically housing architecture, begins after 1396 – the sacral year of Bulgaria’s fall under Turkish domination, which detained and even regressed the development of the

Bulgarian state and society during five long centuries. This period can again be divided in several stages:

- The first stage covers the first centuries of Turkish domination – 15–17 c. – when in the medieval Bulgarian state the development of the feudal economy stopped for a certain period of time and the overall economic activity froze. Besides, with the Turkish invasion of Bulgaria numerous monuments were destroyed and a heavy blow was dealt on the Bulgarian spiritual and material culture.

– The second stage marked a glaring height in the development of Bulgarian culture, which left invaluable monuments - the Bulgarian Revival. This is the period from the second half of the 18th to the mid-19th c., when in the Ottoman Empire a slow transition from feudalism to capitalism started. Owing to its dual nature, being called upon to satisfy both spiritual and material needs, architecture was the first of all arts to respond to the economic and social changes which took place in the Bulgarian society.

– The third stage covers the years after the Liberation from Turkish domination to the Second World War. In this period the capitalist socio-economic relations prevailed in Bulgaria which gave impetus to urban development.

– The fourth stage (1944-1990) was characterised

with the attempt to build a planned socialist economy in Bulgaria. With the progress of industrialisation the cities grew and were built up, and co-operative farming renovated the villages. In this period the first large housing estates were built.

– The fifth stage starts after November 10, 1989, which was another turning point in the development of Bulgarian society. This stage continues to this day. With the removal of the restrictions of planned socialist economy, and above all with the liberation of considerable funds as a consequence of the restitution processes, there was a new boom of construction, not industrial, as it would be logical to expect, but by the same old tradition in housing construction.

We will try to follow the development of this tradition further on.



Dug-in village, painting by Markvichka, fragment.

Bulgaria under Ottoman domination

After nearly half a century of incessant struggles, in 1393 the Turnovo kingdom was finally conquered by the Ottomans, and after the conquering of the Vidin kingdom in 1396 the Bulgarian state no longer existed. Many cities, as Turnovo, Sliven, Yambol, and at the Black Sea were ruined, and many fortresses – the fortresses of Plovdiv, Sliven, Vereya (Stara Zagora), Polos (Burgas district) were destroyed owing to the

staunch resistance of their defenders.

After the storm of conquest passed, the Turkish feudal regime set in Bulgaria. The economy gradually revived. There was an economic upsurge in urban centres dating back to the medieval Bulgarian state, such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Shumen, Varna, Turnovo. New cities emerged – Tatar Zagora, Razgrad. They became centres of intensive construction. Monuments of Ottoman cult and civil architecture were predominantly built. The outer cities lost their

walls. In the city silhouette, the small houses were now dominated not by city walls, fortress towers and churches, but by minarets with golden peaks and leaded domes of mosques.

The residential zone comprised the greater part of the city territory. It consisted of neighbourhoods, in which the diverse population lived according to their ethnic and religious affiliation. The neighbourhoods grew constantly as they were not bound by fortified walls. The city yards were large. The houses were surrounded by gardens.

The house faced the sunny side and the yard. If the house stood on the street line, no windows gave on the street. The complete isolation of the house from the street was typical of the first centuries of the Ottoman domination. In the Muslim neighbourhoods this was necessitated by religious and lifestyle reasons, and in the Bulgarian neighbourhoods by the need to reduce the opportunities for intrusion on the part of the oppressors.

The Ottoman rule did not create favourable conditions for the development of housing architecture even for the Turkish population. The feudatory Turkish population was not in better circumstances than the

Bulgarians. Their houses were not good too. There were no favourable conditions even for the development of architecture for the ruling feudal class. This is especially valid for the 15th and 16th c. The majority of Turkish feudal lords kept provisional, official possessions. The Sultan could withdraw these at any time if they failed to perform some obligation. Besides, the income of the main body of Turkish feudals – the spahis, was comparatively low. This situation did not stimulate them for major construction.

Housing construction of the enslaved population (the rayah) was done in even worse conditions. The mass village dwelling, particularly in the first centuries of the domination, often comprised one room with an open hearth. Even the few wealthier representatives of the rayah could not build themselves handsome houses. The prohibition for the subjugated rayah to wear colourful clothes, to ride on fine horses etc. extended to the construction of mansions. A good-looking house would also betray the affluence of its owner and make him a target for robbery and blackmail on the part of the Turks.

The dug-in houses, as already mentioned, were traditionally widely spread in the Danube plain and

Pavlikyan's house in Koprivshitsa



Dobrudja. This is accounted for by the fact that building timber was hard to get by the mass population in this sparsely wooded area. On the other hand, the drained and easy to dig loess soil favoured the construction of dug-in houses, which provided better protection from the cold in the fields, where strong winds blew in winter, than aboveground structures. The dug-in house is one of the suitable forms of local dwelling and should not be identified solely with the poorest dwelling of that time. Although from the beginning of the 20th century dug-in houses are no longer built, the contemporary houses in these areas are predominantly one-storied buildings with small eaves for the same climatic reasons.

The dug-in houses were built mainly on a sloping land and the entrance was made at the lower side. They were dug in 1.8–2 m deep and were covered with two- or three-slope roofs, which invariably formed an awning above the entrance. The main room (and only room in the poorest houses) was called *v'kashti* (at home) or *u'izhu* (in the hut). Here was the hearth, here people had their meals, rested and received guests. The other room, used mainly for farming purposes, was called *proust* (veranda), when situated in front of the main room, and *zadnitsa* (stern) when situated behind it. The third room served mainly as a bedroom and was called *soba* (bedroom).

Thus formed, these basic rooms, with the same names and purpose, were transferred to the aboveground houses, as well as to much later forms of mass dwelling in the Bulgarian lands for centuries on end. Timber, as a more accessible material, especially in the woodlands, started playing an important role in the construction of mass dwellings. Few houses are preserved from this period owing to the frequent fires - accidental or deliberate. The oldest surviving wooden houses date from the first half of the 18th c. The roofs are tiled, which was a sign of prosperity. The first records of fountains in the yards, wooden ceilings decorated with geometric ornaments, polychrome treatment of walls and ceilings, date back to the same time.

From this period is the preserved Pavlikyan's house in Koprivshtitsa, which was the home of a shepherd. The house is aboveground, made of post-and-plank wooden construction. The windows are small and are closed by sliding wooden shutters on the inside. There are two rooms - *v'kashti* and *proust*. Along the whole length of the front face there is an awning 1.3 m wide, one end of which is slightly raised to form the so-called *odar* (plank-bed) for

sleep and rest.

From the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th c. the unfavourable conditions for housing construction started changing gradually. The central power slackened while the Ottoman court aristocracy played a larger role. This process was accompanied by decline of the spahi-feudal system and consolidation of the feuds. This new situation in the Ottoman Empire was favourable mainly for the big and middle feudal lords but it also reflected on the subjugated population, mostly as a prerequisite for more sizeable housing construction. Since the 17-th c. the number of mansions grew. In his travel notes, the Turkish traveller Evliya Chelebi mentions beside "squalid houses" also "fine one-storey and two-storey houses", "multi-storied houses as in Istanbul", "solid houses".

The houses of the bigger Turkish feudal lords were called palaces (*saray*, *konak*). With this term the Turks denominated the whole residential complex. Many of the "palaces" and the residential buildings in particular were not big. Usually the houses had two rooms with hearths and in-between - a room without flooring and open on its front side. The other type of houses in this period were like the house of the Bishop of Plovdiv, with rooms in a row and a large porch in front of them.

These two types of houses are still widely spread among the Bulgarian and Turkish population in our lands. This fact is very significant for the history of Bulgarian architecture, as it proves the inevitable influence of the Bulgarian art of building on the housing construction of the Turks in our lands. It is known that most of the housing, as well as cult and public construction for the needs of the oppressor was done by Bulgarian builders in the form of various obligations and statute labour. It is established that the architects and builders of the Bairakli Mosque in Samokov were Bulgarians, that Semilie Mosque in Edirne was designed and built by master Manol, and master Nikola Fichev of Dryanovo built the monumental bridges in Byala, Sevlievo and Lovech on commission of the Turkish authorities.

With the economic development of some Bulgarian towns and villages in the 16–17 c. their inhabitants bettered their finances. Wealthier houses appeared. Anybody who could afford it, fortified his house in accordance with his social position and financial resources.

This type of fortified house was not just a whim of well-to-do people. According to the travel notes of contemporary travellers, and as it was pointed out

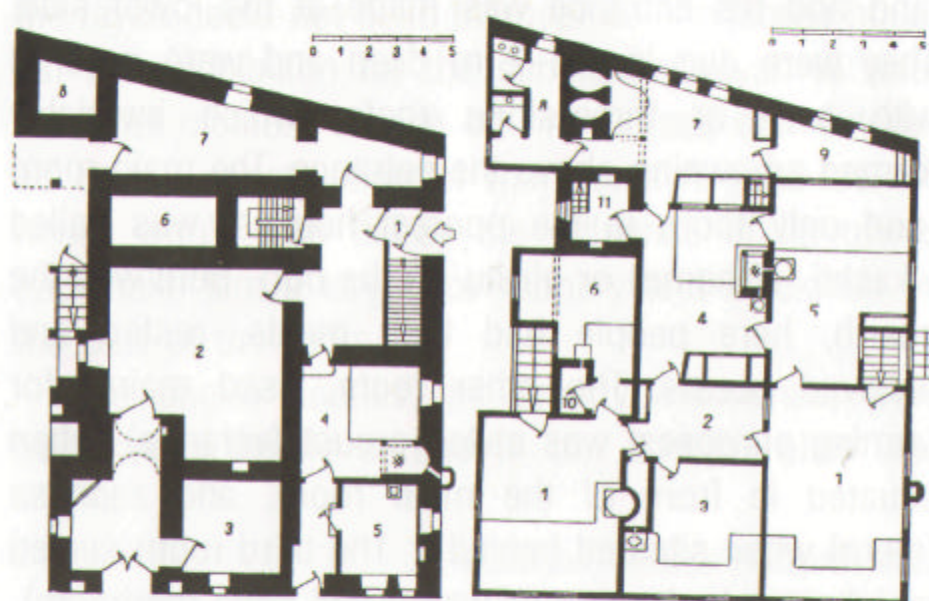
above, these houses already existed as a definite type of architecture in our lands. This long and stable tradition of architecture and building originated in antiquity, long before the foundation of the Bulgarian state, when our ancestors: Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians had to fortify their towns in order to survive in these parts.

This tradition was inherited from the peak achievements in fortress construction during the First and Second Bulgarian States, when the capital city and the forts of the great boyars had to be strongly fortified. It underwent a specific development in the construction of fort-houses and residential towers of the petty boyars – the local landowners. And all this was for the state of Bulgaria to continue.

Then, during the Ottoman domination, this tradition resurrected and gathered new impetus owing to the insecure situation of the Bulgarian population who were determined to stay and live in these lands at any cost, despite the outrages of the oppressors. For the same reason, during the following centuries and particularly in the Revival Period a growing number of people, including many poor people, mostly in the uplands, would start building well fortified houses of stone ground floors and unapproachable stone fences round their yards – a guarantee of security and a symbol of independence.

This same tradition much later will be guiding in the design and construction of the Monument on Mount Shipka, resembling in appearance an old Bulgarian fortress and being in itself a symbol of Bulgarian statehood. Today this tradition is perceptible in the high fences of the houses of the nouveau riche outside Sofia and the other large cities.

Minutely designed fort-houses built in that time are still preserved in Arbanassy and Bansko and offer ample material to researchers of the history of the Bulgarian's house. For many years scholars argued about the origin of these houses. Because their construction contained elements of much later ages, and mainly



Konstantsaliev's house in Arbanassy, plan and view





Konstantsaliev's house in Arbanassy, the kitchen room

because such houses have not been preserved anywhere else in Bulgaria, they were ascribed to Turkish influence or other Balkan people's influence.

Upon careful study of the history, however, after detailed examination and dating of each element of these houses, the dominant evidence is in support of the thesis of the boyar Old-Bulgarian origin of the Arbanassy and Bansko house:

- the privileged Turkish class did not build solid residential buildings, but frame-built, abode houses which had a stone ground floor at the most;
- it is improbable that the subjugated population was allowed to build new houses entirely of stone if they were not preserved examples of fort-houses of Bulgarian boyars;
- the two settlements have a very similar atmosphere, saturated with mystery, inaccessibility and deep antiquity;
- in both settlements the house yards have



Konstantsaliev's house in Arbanassy, interior view

4–5 m high stone fences and large fortified gates with loop-holes;

- in both places there are traces of great devastation, mainly by kurdjali attacks - the stone buildings had been completely or partially destroyed and then restored, restructured and extended;

- in their original stage both types of buildings had a fortress nature – thick stone walls, fortified rooms and hiding-places with embrasures.

In view of the above said, it is logical to suppose that the primary stone model of these houses has gone through three historical phases:

Phase 1: The period of the Second Bulgarian State, when the building was constructed of stone masonry up to the roof.

Phase 2: Early period of Ottoman domination,

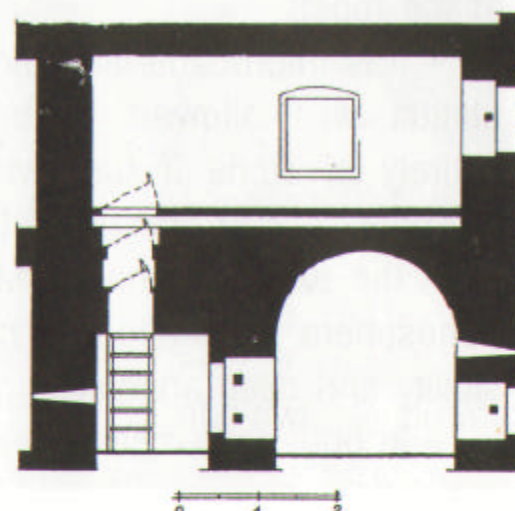
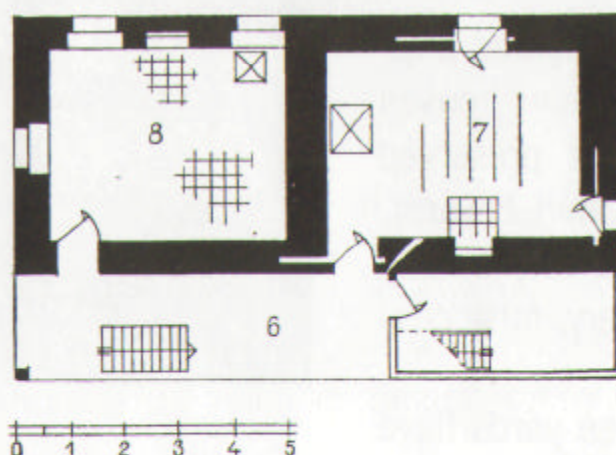
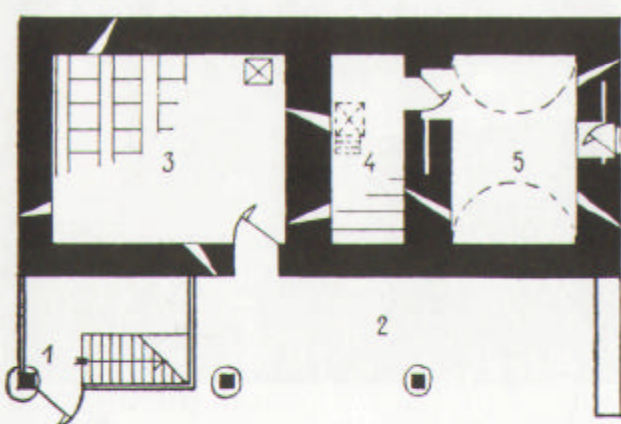
when the reconstruction of the walls, destroyed by the oppressors, was done by visible wooden grilles in the stone masonry (characteristic for the time) or entire upper floors were built of wooden skeleton.

Phase 3: Late period of Ottoman domination and the Revival period, when the jetty protrusions - the verandas - appeared, the windows were larger and the rooms open to light.

There is evidence that Arbanassy (the village of Arbanassy is near Turnovo) existed even in the time of the Second Bulgarian State as an out of town residence of tsars and boyars. This is confirmed by the layout, the facade design, structural peculiarities and method of construction of the preserved ground floors of several houses in the Boyars' neighbourhood (now known as Asen's neighbourhood) in Turnovo,



Hadjigiorgov's house in Bansko, plan and sectional view



having the same hiding-places, arched entrances and thick stone walls, built like those in Arbanassy.

The contemporary form of the Arbanassy house took shape in the 16–17 c. and was gradually adapted to the needs of the wealthy merchants of Arbanassy by adding new premises. The Arbanassy house is a large (220–230 sq. m) freely standing building in a spacious (1000–2000 sq. m) yard surrounded by a high stone fence. The gate to the yard resembles a fortress gate.

The house invariably has a ground floor and an upper floor. The ground floor of all houses is of thick stone masonry reaching up to 1.2 m. For the reasons already mentioned, the upper floor of some houses which escaped destruction is also of stone, and in others it is made of different types of wood frame. In most cases the wooden walls are coated with paint. The interfloor construction is of oak trimmer joists, on which thick cleaved planks are laid. The attic is also wooden, but it is fireproofed on the side of the roof, like in the old houses in Bansko. The use of stone as the basic building material accounts for the fact that the houses of Konstantsaliev, Hadjiiliev, Nikolcho Hadjikostov, Rusevich, etc. are preserved in good repair to this day.

The stone ground floor was used for farm purposes and the upper floor for living. At the ground floor there is also a well concealed hiding-place, remnant of the original boyar's house. A novelty of later times was the covered porch, which served mainly for receiving guests. There is a separate guest room too. The rooms were heated uniquely by brick stoves which, for fire risk and hygiene reasons, were lit from special little adjoining rooms. Unique for the time was also the location of bathrooms and toilets on the upper floor.

The interior decorations are very rich and diverse. They date back to the latest reconstructions and cover the doors and cupboards, the window shutters, form friezes in the upper parts of the walls, fill the plane of the ceilings and brick stoves.

Archaeological evidence from the medieval Setan fortress, in the proximity of the town of Bansko, and the great similarity of Bansko architecture with the medieval houses in Turnovo, Lovech and Arbanassy, give sufficient grounds to seek the origin of this settlement again in the period of the Second Bulgarian State. The seat of the local ban (prince) is supposed to have been here, at Setan Kale. Hence one of the versions for the origin of the name of the town of Bansko.

A preserved example of the Bansko fort-houses is Hadjigiorgov's house. It is situated in a large yard, divided by tall stone walls so that each side of the house looks on a separate yard. These yards were connected by strong little doors. The house is solid and two-storied. All the walls are of stone masoned on lime-and-sand. On the ground floor is the podnik (cattle-shed), on the upper floor there are two rooms with doors to a 2 m wide poton (porch).

The windows have iron gratings on the outside and wooden shutters, bolted by sliding bars hidden in the thick wall, on the inside. The door of the winter room ("v'kashti") is locked on the inside by two such bars and a big wrought iron lock. The door is small but solid and sheathed with thick wrought iron sheets on the outside. On the left of the door there is a slit in the thick wall towards the staircase to meet unwelcome visitors with a bullet. It would be hard to break



Pirgov's Tower in Kyustendil



Kutpashov's Tower in Vratsa

into this fortified room. The two rows of beams forming the ceiling are covered on top with about 40 cm thick stone blockage cemented with mortar. In this way the ceiling was safeguarded from fire, and at the same time was hard to break through. Even the possible inlet through the chimney was blocked by build-

ing in two crosswise iron bars. If the fortified room could not withstand an attack, the family could go down to the hiding-place below. A wooden trap-door on the floor, two more iron trap-doors underneath and a narrow stair connected the two floors. The ceiling of the hiding-place is similar to that of the upper room,



The Meshchievs' Tower in Vratsa

only here the stone blockage is 1.2 m thick. Embrasures in the walls allow the house to be defended against attackers.

There are other preserved fort-houses in Bansko too – Todev's, Vulchov's, Benin's, Velyanov's, Sirleshtov's, etc. Expert studies showed that all fortified houses in Bansko are based on a triangle of sides 3:4:5. This Old-Bulgarian method of building, typical for the cult architecture during the Second Bulgarian State, is yet another evidence for the boyar's medieval origin of these buildings.

In Lovech, where there was also a fortress, respectively a wealthy boyar class, there are preserved ground floors of houses which, despite multiple reconstructions, also support the thesis that fortified houses occurred in other parts of the country.

They exhibit the same characteristic features as the Arbanassy and Bansko old houses. And it could not have been otherwise, as the political and economic conditions of feudalism were equal everywhere and they generated identical architectural forms in the quest of security.

The last remnants of the boyar's housing architecture – the residential towers - also bear great similarity to the Bansko house. The rough fort architecture is the same, the same building method was applied, protection of the entrances was sought and of the wooden construction against fire. What is more, these are thought to be the prototype of the fortified houses. In the first years of Ottoman domination they became the main residential quarters of the beys and spahis, that is why they are known by

the names of their Turkish inhabitants.

In Kyustendil Pirkov's Tower is preserved to the present-day, and Kutpashov's and the Tower of the Meshchievs in Vratsa. Nearly all towers were three-storied, with one residential room on each floor. The entrance was usually by a wooden ladder directly to the floor, as is the case in Hrelyo's Tower in the Rila Monastery.

*Hrelyo's Tower in the courtyard of
the Rila Monastery*





The Bulgarian National Revival Period (18th – mid-19th c.)

During the second half of the 18th c. in the Ottoman Empire, specifically in its Balkan territories, started a process of transition from feudalism to capitalism. The craft industry in Bulgaria grew considerably, and hence the domestic and foreign trade. The stir in economic life soon required the construction of special buildings for crafts and trade purposes.

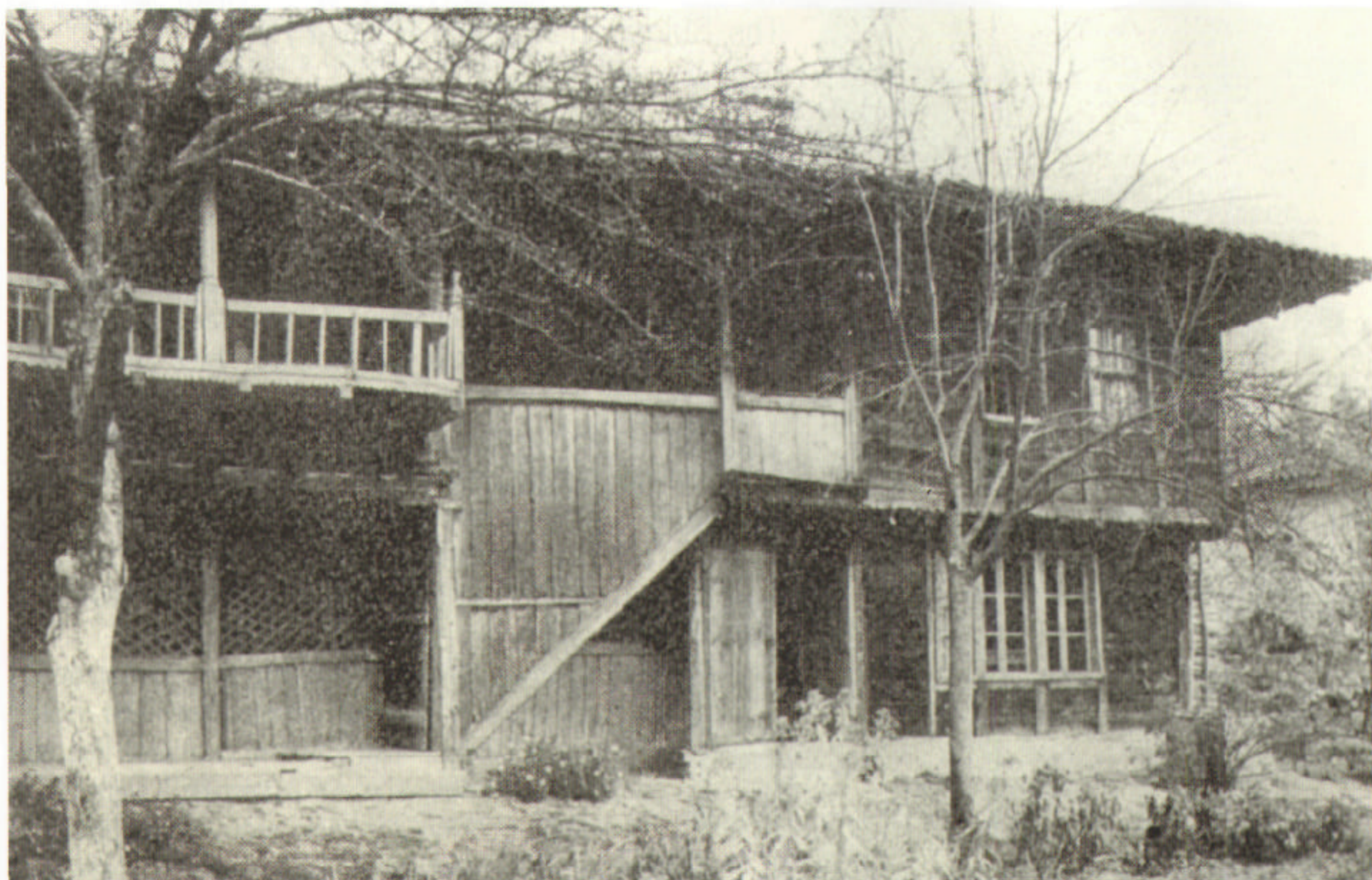
In the cities intensive housing construction started too. The new Bulgarian middle class of “chorbadjis”, usurers, merchants and craftsmen needed new houses in content, dimensions and disposition, and hence new in architectural form and decoration. The poorer Bulgarians also started building, although smaller and more modest, houses to suit their changed needs and conditions of life.

The changes which took place during the Revival period were very conspicuous in housing construction. The typical Revival house was a family house situated in a yard that was entirely a garden or a combination with a farmyard. Here again, as in the pre-Revival tradition, the main room of the Bulgarian house remained the room with the hearth – “v’kashti”. Gradually the name of this room started to denominate the whole house. “Kashti”, together with the other main rooms: the store-room – “proust”, the open porch (“chardak”) and the larder (“kiler”) are the basic components of the early Revival house. Later a proper bedroom was developed - soba. The cellar (izba) was also developed as part of the ground floor.

As a result of various combinations of these main rooms, one or several of each, in the different parts of the country the layout and composition of the Bulgarian house acquired different forms. After the name of the district centres, the following types were formed: Razlog, Kotel, Teteven, Tryavna, Koprivshtitsa, Plovdiv, Pleven, Arbanassy house, etc. This is yet another evidence of the creative dash of the self-taught Bulgarian master-builders who created an immense diversity of individual designs.

Typical for the Kotel and Koprivshtitsa house is the plank-beam construction, the tiled roof, the extensive use of wood and the exuberant decoration of the interior, the existence of a proust, which later became a representative room for receiving guests – posreshtnik, very typical for the Zheravna house. The modest appearance of the latter in no way suggests great wealth of the details in the interior.

The population of Koprivshtitsa, for the high altitude of the place and scarce arable land, was occupied predominately with cattle-breeding. Towards the end of the 18th c. the trade in fatted cattle and meat products developed here. Later, during the Revival, thanks to the proximity of Plovdiv there were favourable conditions for homespun tailoring and cartage. The rapidly



Dushkov's house in Koprivshtitsa

growing prosperity of the population gave a strong impetus to housing construction. In less than half a century, from the last burning down of the town by the kurdjali in 1810 to the mid-19th c., Koprivshtitsa was almost completely rebuilt. The houses were usually situated in the northern part of a spacious courtyard, their facade with the porch looking onto it. A tall stone fence and solid oak gates isolated the courtyard from intruding eyes and wicked intentions.

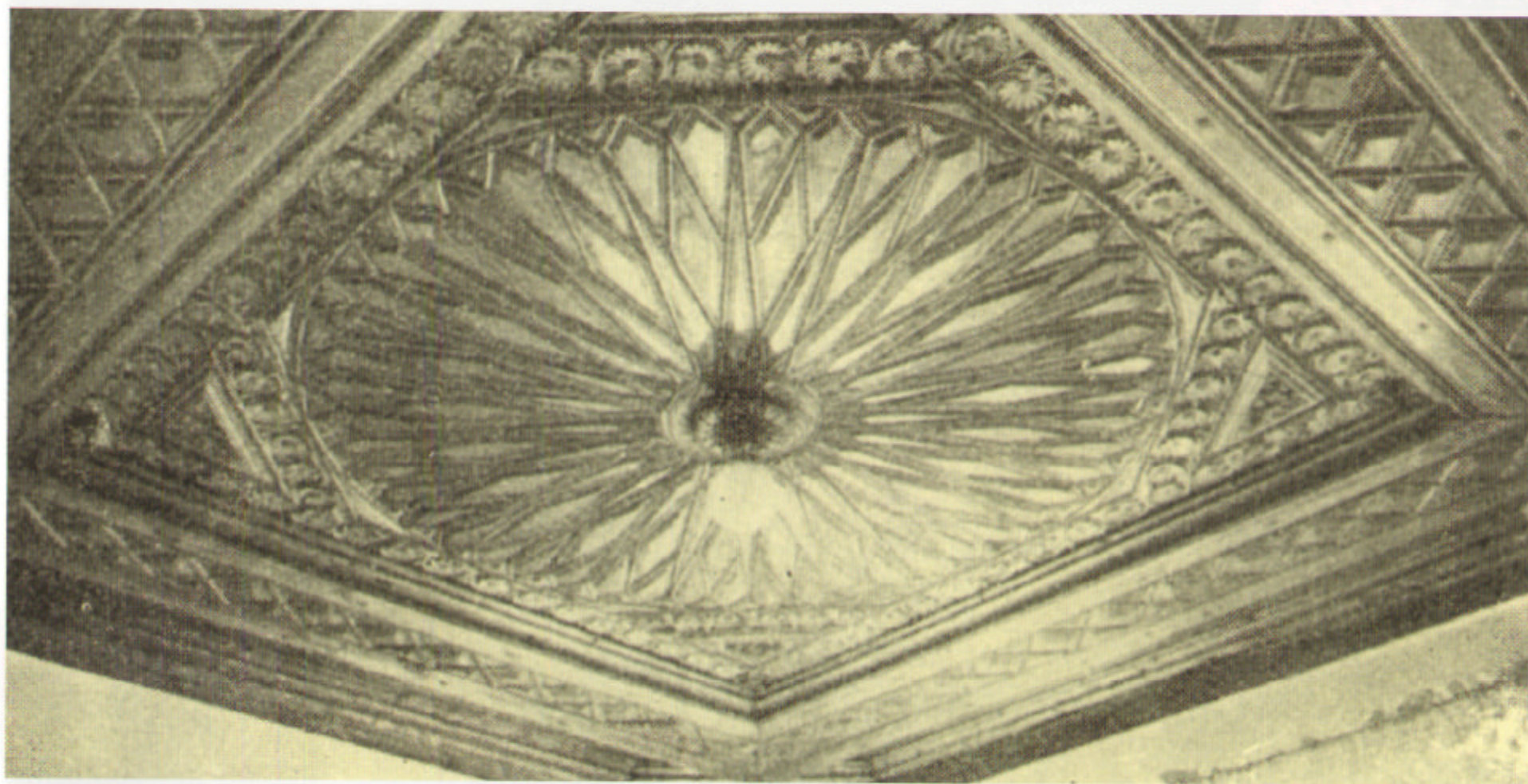
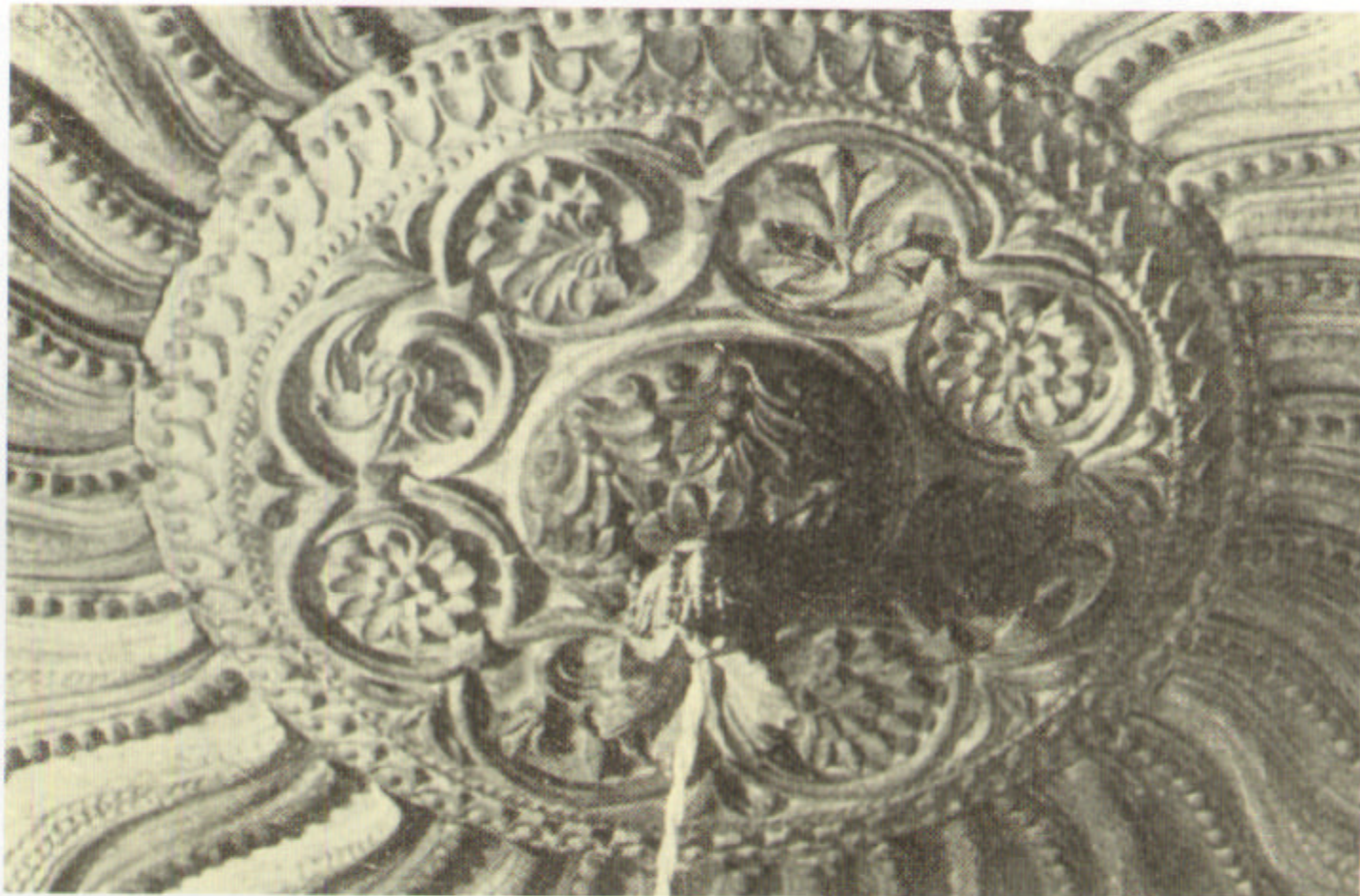
When in the 1830s and 1840s home manufacture grew, the houses of the wealthy Koprivshtitsa dwellers changed. In the first place it was necessary to extend the porch (chardak), which was called *otvod* here and was the place for carrying out most of the production work. The proust, in which the finished products were stored, was also enlarged. In some houses - Karavelov's, Dushkov's, Djogolanov's, at one corner of the *otvod* there was a raised part - *kyoshk*, used both for work and as *odar*, a place to sleep in the summertime. Highly esteemed guests were also received here.

The houses in the entire Balkan Range region are characterised by stone masonry of the ground floor and a lath-and-plaster upper floor. This is the way the preserved samples of the Tryavna house are also built,



Daskalov's house in Tryavna

with its typical white walls of the frame-built upper floor. With the luxuriantly wooded mountain slopes, the population of this region early took to woodworking and the settlements situated at the major moun-



tain passes became wealthy trade, craft and cultural centres of developed woodcarving, icon-painting and house building.

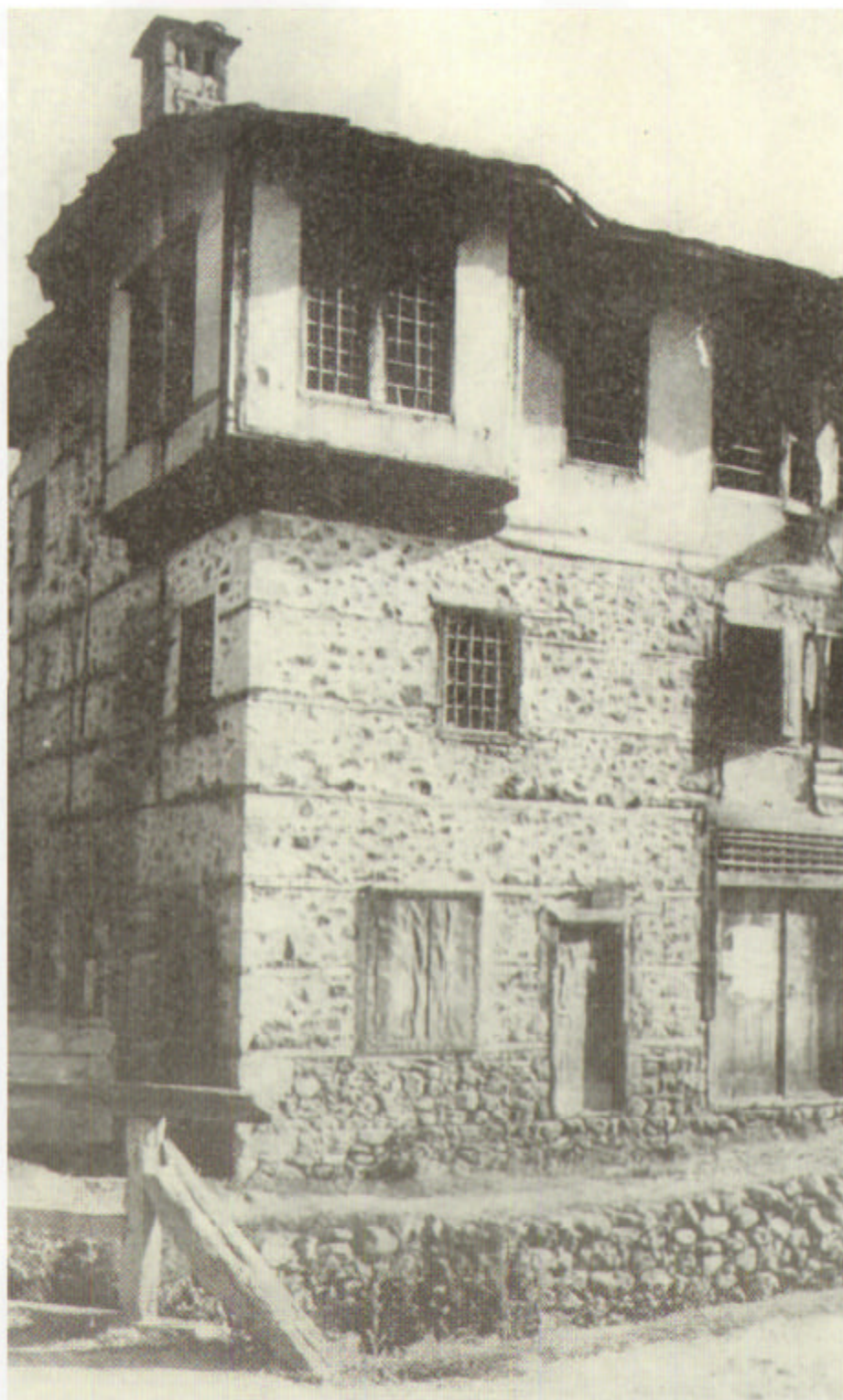
A climax in the plan and composition and decorative art development of the Tryavna house is Daskalov's house, built in 1807 by the local masters Dimiter and Ivan. It is known for its two highly artistic wooden ceilings, made in contest between these two masters, as well as for its symmetrical layout obtained in a natural way by doubling simpler forms common for these parts. Typical for the local popular house are the angular windows, stone slab roofs, and the large hearth in a corner of the living room (v'kashti).

Daskalov's house in Tryavna, woodcarved ceilings

The pre-Revival Rhodope house architecture is little known, but in the conditions of the feudal natural economy it developed exclusively on local ground (considering the hard accessibility of the Rhodope Mountains), as the work of the Bulgarian population, formed by Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians. This tradition and succession, not only in building but in all forms of lifestyle and culture in these parts, was not broken even by the forceful conversion to Mohammedanism of a large part of the Rhodope Bulgarian population. From the point of view of architecture, the most interesting settlements in the Middle Rhodopes are Shiroka Luka and the Smolyan quarters of Raikovo and Ustovo, and the town of Melnik to the south-west.

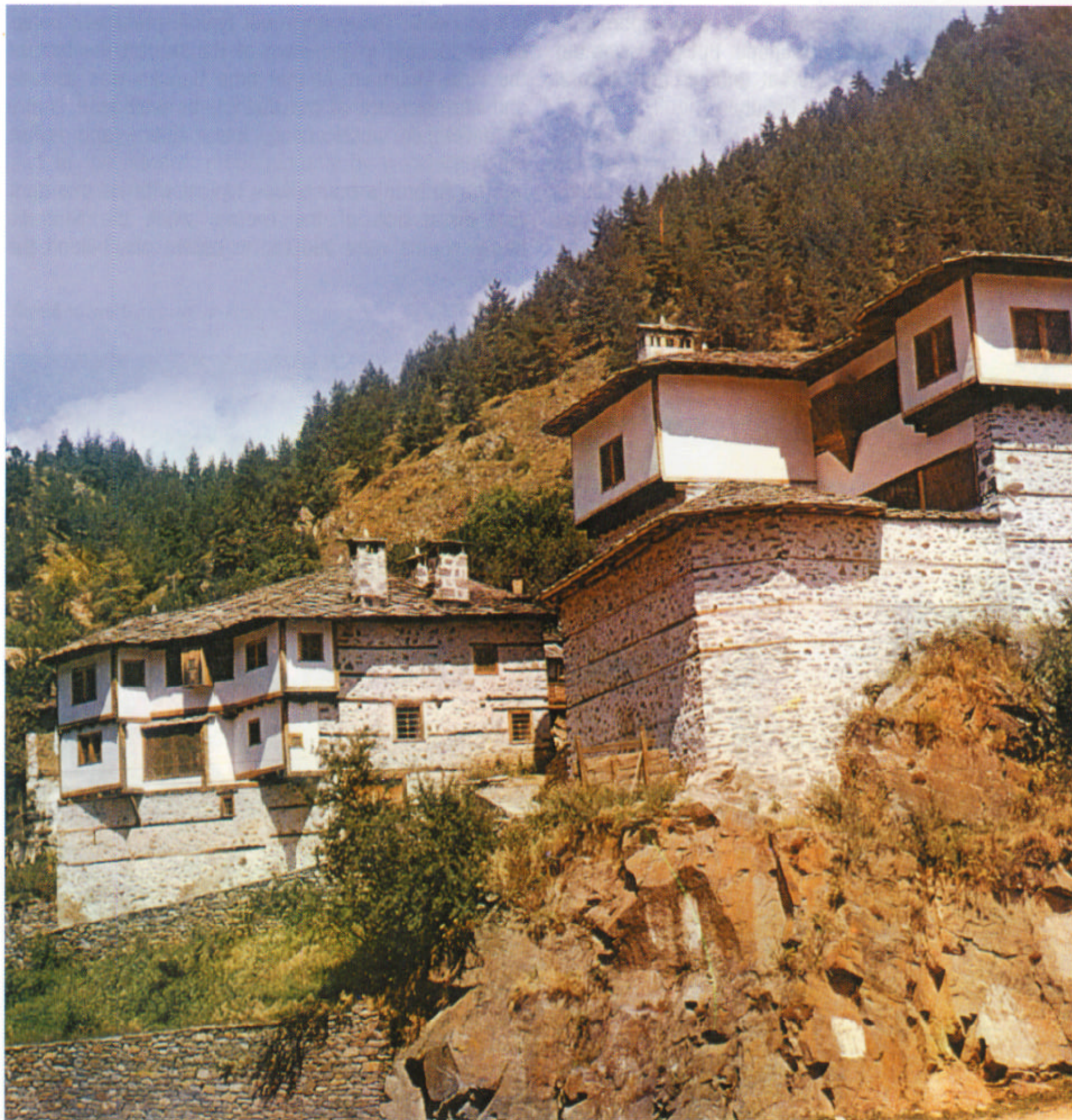
The Rhodope house belongs to the most advanced forms of traditional dwelling in Bulgaria and even at first sight resembles a fort. This impression is strengthened by the tall, even and unplastered walls, horizontally divided by several rows of wooden girdles. In most houses there are no windows on the ground floor and very few small ones in the stone walls of the upper floor.

The Rhodope houses are loosely situated on the sunny slopes in the valleys in picturesque groups and hamlets. They are typical for their wide and long poton (veranda) with extensions between the rooms in the form of raised parts called benches (kiosks), solid stone masonry of the outer walls and large dimensions



Raikovo quarters, Smolyan





View of Shiroka Luka

of the building. The roofs are covered with stone slabs called tikli here. The exterior and interior architecture is distinguished for its extraordinary richness of forms and decorations. On the roof tops and on the chimneys there are often white cone-shaped stone shafts, called dolls, which give a fine finish to the roofs.

Owing to the sparse, steep and stony terrain, the yards are small, so the ground floor takes up many of the functions of the courtyard and is called inner courtyard. Its entrance is straight from the street through a two-winged door. Very characteristic for the

Rhodope houses is that they are many-storied, their bow projections and above all the hearths built on the outer walls. Owing to the harsher climatic conditions the veranda turned into a room – poton. Often the poton was the place for the stove and sink, and in wealthier houses there is a kiosk with rich decoration.

Once a contemporary Bulgarian architect asked old Rhodope master-builders why they make oriels in their buildings and they said:

“We make oriels to avoid the crooked and irregular outlines in the ground floor (because of the

ancient streets) and to obtain on the upper floor rooms with regular and good shape. But this gives our buildings unique beauty." What inborn and natural sense of unity of utility and beauty!

Notwithstanding the common trends in the architectural and artistic design, in each corner of the country a local type of Revival house evolved, different from the rest. The Razlog house, for example, has a windshield anteroom - boariya - and a special larder

- brashnenik. Today the most typical preserved houses are located in the town of Bansko, at the foot of the Pirin Mountain. At that time Bansko was a trade and crafts centre of the district, as well as a centre of developed woodcarving, icon-painting and house building.

The Dobrudja house was typical with its one-floor row disposition of the rooms, while the Strandja house rooms were laid out in depth, one behind the

View of Melnik.



other, and surrounded by a veranda. Wood-lagged facades and short eaves are typical of the Black Sea house.

All houses of the Revival period are enriched to some degree with architectural details on the facade and in the interior, predominantly by wood-carving - colonettes and parapets on the verandas, frames and wings on the doors and windows, panels on the ceilings and cupboards, iconostases, etc.

Predominant are the two-storey buildings of varied geometry, plastic distinction of the floors by the use of different building material and oriel projection of the upper floor. There appeared, although rarely, three-storey houses which was evidence of the higher civil engineering knowledge of the popular masters. One of the few preserved three-storey houses is Lafchiev's house in Dryanovo built in the 1840s.

The stir in economic and cultural life and the

The house of Georgiadi in Plovdiv.





development of town lifestyle enhanced the tendency to greater representativeness of the main rooms. Thus in the second quarter of the 19th c. emerged the so-called Plovdiv house – closed multiroom house with a salon (otvod, living room) as the composition nucleus, replacing the veranda. The name Plovdiv house is in a sense provisional because it is spread in nearly all wealthy settlements of the country as a home of the city bourgeoisie and the village wealthy men. Apart from Plovdiv it is found in Asenovgrad, Yambol, Sliven, Karlovo, Koprivshtitsa, Sofia, Samokov. In Plovdiv the best exponents are the houses of Argir Koyumdjioglu, Nedkovich, and D. Gergiadi, in Koprivshtitsa – Oslekov's, Kableshekov's and Lyutov's houses, and in Karlovo – Dervishev's and Zoev's houses.

In some principles and forms of layout and composition of the Plovdiv house, and especially in its





ornamentation – characteristic painted motifs, the decorative design of ceilings, cupboards, door panels and “alafrangas” (decorative niches in the interior) – certain borrowings are discerned from various Russian and West European styles and artistic trends: baroque, rococo, classicism, eclecticism. These influences however are refracted through the strong local architectural tradition. These two basic factors resulted in an original Bulgarian architecture of high artistic quality.

The house of Argir Koyumdjioglu in Plovdiv

Plovdiv





*Dechkov's house
in Gabrovo*



Oslekov's house in Koprivshtitsa

Bulgaria after the Liberation to the Second World War

With the help of Russia, in 1878 Bulgaria was liberated from Ottoman domination. In parallel with the political liberation a radical economic and social change took place in the life of the Bulgarian people, and the capitalist socio-economic relations became dominant. But it was the Union of Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria (northern and southern Bulgaria) in 1885 that gave a real impetus to the development of capitalism in general and architecture in particular.

In the decades that followed the look of Bulgarian villages and towns changed radically. With the progress of capitalism, in the stead of the old craft towns of Kotel, Koprivshtitsa, Panagyurishte, Kalofer larger industrial centres developed such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Ruse, Pleven, Sliven. The increased inflow of poor people looking for jobs in the large cities caused

their quick growth. On the other hand, the ruling bourgeoisie started building modern houses to meet their new cultural and lifestyle needs. The changed town life also called for urban development activities: modern water supply, sewerage, lighting, street pavement.

For the needs of the different social strata of Bulgarian society, which emerged after the Liberation, residential houses of different content appeared:

- private rural and town houses;
- private trade-residential buildings;
- co-operative multi-storey blocks of flats;
- municipal and state residential buildings.

The rural house continued for a long time to be constructed according to the pre-Revival traditions. For example, in the Balkan Range and Sredna Gora settlements of Koprivshtitsa, Teteven and Tryavna construction stuck to the old schemes; in the Rhodopes stone two- or three-storey houses with frame-built oriel projections were built, etc. However, in the villages around the larger cities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Pleven, Sliven, Veliko Turnovo, etc. - these traditions were abandoned owing to the influence of the town solid building and layouts.

Ruse, the house of Simeonov





Sofia, the houses of Sarmadjiev and Yablanski

The town house emerged and initially developed as a house of the lower middle-class and later of the wealthy upper middle-class.

The lower middle-class town house started to be constructed immediately after the Liberation for the housing needs of artisans, small shopkeepers and lower civil servants. It was a one-storey house (cellar and floor) with 3–4 rooms. At first it was frame-built but owing to the eternal strive of the Bulgarian for a durable dwelling, soon houses of solid stone (in the cellar) and brick (on the floor) walls appeared. Although simplified in its interior, the exterior of this house speaks of certain prosperity of its owner.

With the increase of migration processes to large industrial centres, this small house became more widespread. After the wars (1912–1918) it had to meet the pressing housing needs not only of the local population but also of the thousands of refugees from Macedonia, Thrace and Dobrudja. This house retained its plan scheme but acquired a more simple exterior. Gradually it became the main type of mass housing construction in Bulgaria until 1944.

With the growth of material wealth of the Bulgarian middle class its lifestyle and cultural needs expanded. Thus the upper middle-class town house appeared to satisfy the desire for style and to create greater modern conveniences for the higher administration servants and the richer merchants and entrepreneurs. Although at first these were one-storey houses (cellar, floor and garret), they were distinguished with an opulent layout, spacious and high rooms, and a suf-



ficient number of offices and sanitary rooms.

The architectural visage of some houses (such as those of Sarmadjiev and Yablanski in Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd. in Sofia) is so richly diversified and segmented with baroque elements and forms: frontons, balconies, porticoes, sculptures, vases, balustrades, etc. that the house is a little palace situated amidst a well-formed garden, surrounded by a tall iron fence.

After the First World War (1914–1918) the economic development and the growing housing shortage channelled part of the free capital to investments for rent. Thus the first trade-residential buildings appeared. Their ground floor was meant for shops and on the floors there were offices and flats. This type of buildings received a new, contemporary development after 1990.

After the wars (1912–1918) the housing shortage in the big towns reached unprecedented dimensions. The state could not cope with the problem of the homeless and the refugees. The poorest strata of the



Sofia, a co-operative block of flats

population took to a random construction of cheap and unsanitary little houses in the miserable suburbs.

The housing shortage, however, extended to the middle strata of the population who had a higher living standard. As already repeatedly mentioned, throughout his centuries-long history the Bulgarian always sought a way and found means to build a home where there was means of livelihood for his family. And in this strive he often came to solutions unique in the world history.

Thus in 1925–1926 in Sofia appeared a new, purely Bulgarian form of town housing construction – the co-operative. People in need of housing set up housing construction co-operative societies, usually including the owner of the land plot, and the funds for the construction were secured from the savings of the co-operators. Investing their own money, they became more exigent to the final product – better locations were sought, at street corners or on wide streets, good architects and contractors were employed for the design and construction of the building. The period 1925–1939 saw a mass construction of multi-storey residential houses with stylish architecture which lent the central part of Sofia the look of a large and modern city. This created a practical opportunity for people of average income to acquire a dwelling in a nice place in the city centrum. All without the participation of large investors and banks.

The construction of these houses was monolithic, of reinforced concrete frame and brick filling. The exterior reflected the individual views of the designer – balconies, loggias, pargeting, Ruse-stone facing. Bulgarian architects managed to develop the internal arrangement so as to suit the Bulgarian lifestyle. A new form of town dwelling of the Bulgarian – the flat – was created and established. Although the plan of each building and flat is different, the basic concept of grouping the rooms around a central room (vestibule, living-room) was universally observed. In most cases it had direct light and a wide portal connected it with one or two of the rooms. The wardrobe entrance-hall was introduced, kitchens, bathrooms, larders, hanging closets were envisaged.

In the 1940s this purely Bulgarian form of co-operative blocks of flats quickly spread throughout the country. Socio-economic conditions in the next decades however did not establish it as a main form of town housing construction, although later it found wide application abroad. And despite the fact it had proved its progressive role in building a more individual home for every Bulgarian. It could also have been a way of breaking the monotony of prefab housing estates built later. With some minor changes the co-operative block of flats still exists today.

The first attempts to solve urgent housing problems by constructing state-owned residential buildings

date back to 1925–1935, when several workers' hostels were built for miners in Pernik. Around the same time the railway workers' dwellings were built near the railway stations of Sofia, Septemvri, Plovdiv, etc. The dwellings were economic, the facades simplified to the maximum.

In 1935–1937 Sofia municipality organised the first construction of a large housing estate, comprising blocks of flats along A. Stamboliiski Blvd. and self-contained villa-like houses in the block between N. Tsanov St. and Tatarli St. This construction of houses with human and attractive face was a progressive phenomenon and a considerable achievement in

Bulgarian housing construction as it was done on a preliminary town-planning scheme.

In the beginning of the Second World War (1941–1945) for the needs of workers and state employees, the state used the rich fund of Social Insurance to build blocks of flats in Zaharna Fabrika district in Sofia.



*Sofia, A. Stamboliiski
housing estate*



*Sofia, Zaharna Fabrika
housing estate*

Housing construction between 1944 and 1990

After the end of the Second World War Bulgaria set out on the road to building socialist socio-economic relations. Alongside that the process of industrialisation of the cities continued and deepened. As a result, the migration from villages to towns increased. A number of cities not only grew in population but also expanded to encompass many neighbouring villages and quickly turned them into city quarters. Their inhabitants was occupied mainly with the growth of fruits and vegetables for the city population. Their desire to live like town dwellers got the upper hand and they started copying the city houses.

The quick exodus from the villages to the cities and industrial districts not only caused the depopulation of many villages but led to the complete migration of the population in some of them, mainly mountain and hill hamlets.

However, new migration processes also emerged. Co-operation and consolidation in rural economy spurred the migration of the population from smaller villages to larger ones. These are the villages which started playing the role of district agricultural centres (particularly in the areas of extensive agriculture). In consequence they grew in size and population, they developed and the state administration pronounced

some of them as the so-called settlements of urban type. To provide occupation for the increased population, small workshops of the light industry were opened in them. The grown material prosperity of the people in such villages found expression in the construction of large two- and three-storey houses, richly furnished to contemporary standards.

Many villages and railway-station settlements briskly expanded owing to their industrial development and were legally made towns. From then on they would develop in different directions, depending on their economic-geographical position, size, and reproduction capabilities.

In the period under consideration, the following basic stages of development of the Bulgarian town architecture and town dwellings in particular may be outlined:

1. Until 1948 – In these post-war years the main efforts were directed at eliminating the devastation of war.

2. 1948-1956 – Planned socialist economy was finally established. The ruling Bulgarian Communist Party began a policy of industrialisation of the country and co-operation in agriculture. In this period, under the influence of the cult to personality in the USSR, in Bulgaria the so-called “ukrashatelska” (decorative) architecture developed.

Apart from public buildings, this decorative trend spread on housing construction. In the dwelling's plan the corridor scheme replaced the old Bulgarian



*Sofia, residential
building in Sofiiska
Komuna St.*

Sofia, residential building in Stamboliiski Blvd. with the Central Children's Store on the ground floor



Sofia, residential building at Sofiiska Komuna St. and Alabin St.



national tradition of clustering the rooms round a vestibule or living-room. Under the influence of "classicism" the height of rooms and windows became unnecessarily high. The wide windows, loggias and balconies, suitable for our climatic conditions disappeared. Renaissance and Baroque details were massively applied on the facades. The cost of construction was unnecessarily raised without providing any functional or aesthetic advantages.

Notwithstanding the above said, the new generation of Bulgarian architects of the early 1960s demonstrated good taste and avoided the most superfluous

and pompous decorative elements. Thus in Sofia valuable residential buildings were built which still decorate the streets of the capital. Good examples in this respect are the buildings: in Sofiiska Komuna St. opposite the City Gallery, at Sofiiska Komuna St. and Alabin St., in Stamboliiski Blvd. with the Central Children's Store on the ground floor, at Rakovski St. and Graf Ignatiev St.

3. After 1956 – This period was characterised by abolishment of the "decorative" trends, while the rapid industrialisation and town growth aggravated the need of large-scale housing construction. Thus the first



Sofia, residential building at Rakovski St. and Graf Ignatiev St.

large housing estates emerged. The dominant role of the state as investor and executor was a prerequisite, on the basis of a preliminarily drawn town plan, to build up large city and out-of-town areas.

One of the first housing estates in Sofia was Vladimir Zaimov housing estate (presently Oborishte). In a favourable environment (behind a southern park), with an informal and serene external architecture, various residential buildings were erected. High and low structures were harmonically alternated.

With a different visage, but also with a marked individuality and serenity is South Park housing estate built in 1957. The blocks are mainly 3- or 4-storied, amidst lush greenery. Here, for the quick solution of the housing problems, a limited number of small-size dwellings were experimentally constructed but they were not received with enthusiasm because small-size was mistaken with inconvenient dwelling.

An important stage in housing construction in Sofia was the building in 1961 of Lenin housing estate (present-day Yavorov). Apart from blocks of flats, on an area of 18 ha there are kindergartens, policlinics, etc. The terrain, as in the other examples, is also planted with trees and shrubs.

Judged on their merits, the wonderful examples of the housing estates of Tolbuhin and Izgrev in Burgas,

Chaika in Varna etc. should be mentioned.

In the period of industrialisation and urbanisation of Bulgaria, the intensive development of the populated areas (and especially towns) in the last quarter of the 20th c. led to an uncontrolled territorial and demographic growth. Thus for the speedy solution of the rising housing needs new structures emerged on virgin land - buildings and housing estates built by the so-called industrial methods. These to a great extent form the present-day silhouette of most of the Bulgarian cities and towns.

Unfortunately, the extensive application of prefabricated construction (popularly known as panel buildings) involved the creation of a simplified and uniform architecture which deprived of individuality cities of different geographic location and spirit. Despite their considerable urban-development, architectural, constructional and exploitation shortcomings, these housing estates marked a definite stage in the socio-economic development of Bulgaria, characterised by the need of speedy solution of the housing problem.

Despite the enumerated deficiencies, this construction was the result of a not so successful but targeted state policy for the solution of this problem. The result is unsatisfactory both in quantitative and qualitative terms, but the Bulgarian (mostly in towns)

had the chance to acquire a private dwelling at a price commensurate with his income and at low-interest credit. More or less, at that stage these buildings played the role of the always cherished family fortress. By 1960 only in Sofia about 3000 dwellings a year were constructed by the industrial methods. Their share was highest in the period of 1976–1985 when 50,000 such dwellings were constructed in Bulgaria annually. Prefabricated dwellings continued to be built until 1994. Today in nearly 870,000 panel dwellings live about 2,000,000 inhabitants or 23% of the population.

Even though the Bulgarian never “fell in love” with panel buildings owing to their above-mentioned deficiencies, they remain practically his only possibility to get the desired (and necessary) town dwelling. His inborn sense of beauty and practicality, however, combined with his proverbial industriousness, help him diversify as much as he can on his own and with his limited resources the dull, cramped and uncomely “panel flats”. It is not rare that upon entering such a dwelling one is amazed at the owner’s inventiveness, how he has transformed the ready-made into a cosy nest for his family. His imagination and skilful hands have enriched the interior with flooring and wall-lining of natural materials, and the ready-made furniture is refashioned so as to look custom-made.

There are countless examples also of partial change of the function of some rooms. Most often out of necessity a balcony, loggia or corridor is transformed into a kitchen to vacate a small room for the grown up children. But very often “reconstruction” of the “firm planning” is done just so that “my dwelling is different from that of the neighbour”.

The Bulgarian hates uniformity. Just as you cannot see two identical houses in Koprivshtitsa of the Revival Period, so you cannot visit two flats identical in spirit and furnishing in the otherwise typical and equally grey on the exterior panel blocks of flats.

In the period under consideration, the share of dwellings constructed by the traditional (and always preferred by the Bulgarian) monolithic way decreased sharply, but did not disappear. It went on with the construction of flats in the small towns by housing construction co-operatives or houses in small towns and predominantly in the villages by the so-called enterprise, i.e. partially with family money and work, but mainly with low-interest credit from the then state banks. Thus in this period, especially in the wealthier villages, enormous houses were built which remained almost uninhabited because they by far exceeded the



Sofia, Lenin housing estate

actual needs of the family. The grown up children found work in town, where they in turn started building their own dwellings.

Statistics gives a clear idea of this process: for the 30-year period from 1961 to 1990, about 3,900,000 people acquired new 1,650,000 private dwellings, although half of them were "prefab".

The Bulgarian's desire to escape from the confinement of ready-made panel flats and his genetically inherited age-old attraction to the land at a certain moment in his life got the upper hand and found expression in the boom of villa construction in the out-of-town zones in the second half of the 20th cen-

tury. Outside big and small towns alike. Not "some kind of wooden huts" of seasonal nature, where one can get shelter in bad weather, but solid two- to four-storyed houses. Provided that in most cases he had a similar house in some village, deserted or inhabited only by his old parents.

There is no better example to illustrate the thesis of the Bulgarian's attachment to the land and his eternal thirst to build a proprietary dwelling to his own taste.



Burgas, Tolbuhin housing estate



Contemporary trends after 1990

As already mentioned, in the years between 1960 and 1990 the major part of the housing existing today in Bulgaria was built. Although the centralisation of this process in the hands of the state had positive results at first, its later carrying to the extreme incurred considerable damages above all to the quality of habitation of the Bulgarian:

- the innate Bulgarian initiative to build was restricted by putting up all sorts of legal and administrative obstacles to housing construction co-operatives, and in the central parts of the cities they were the only way to build up the limited vacant plots and “fill” the spaces between existing buildings;

- monolithic construction was restricted as the

only way to go out of the cliché and set up cosier homes meeting higher modern utilitarian and aesthetic criteria;

- richer Bulgarians were impeded from building bigger dwellings, corresponding to their higher requirements and resources, by passing a law on 60 sq. m average area of the apartments in a newly built blocks of flats.

- there was restricted, or rather underdeveloped, production of quality materials for finishing works, many of which are traditional in Bulgarian building;

- ultimately, the housing shortage was not overcome, on the contrary – it was deepened.

Therefore it is no wonder that when free funds concentrated in part of the Bulgarians, as a result of the restitution processes after 1990, the first thing they did was to build or buy a new home. Contrary to economic logic, again the Bulgarian's



thirst for having a proprietary home prevailed over the prospect of starting a business with this money, as probably anyone else in the world would have done.

Despite the deep socio-economic crisis, the state abdicated its obligation to provide jobs for everyone and a slow and painful transition from centralised to market-oriented economy started.

The state gave up housing construction. At the same time migration to the larger cities, where there were still some job opportunities, increased. And this aggravated the existing housing shortage there. State banks stopped granting low-interest credits. The new commercial banks abstained from mass crediting of housing construction, under the excuse of insufficient free resources and the absence of developed and centrally guaranteed mortgage system.

Under these restricted conditions and large demand in Bulgaria again a unique system of housing construction was created. It emerged



spontaneously mainly in the capital and in the large cities on the basis of the experience of the Bulgarian housing construction co-operative, without participation of credit institutions. The newly incorporated building entrepreneurs, who still did not have large initial investments, could not secure a credit for such construction, but could afford to look for and explore building plots. Again for this old Bulgarian weakness for property, the owners of such plots agreed to be compensated with property in the future buildings instead of money.

Upon approval of the design and start of construction the future owners of the flats were found and, under contract with the entrepreneur, they paid their homes in several instalments during construction. Thus they did not have to pay the lump sum at once and got spare money to run their family business. Besides, they could make adjustments in the original plan of the building to suit their taste and order specific finishing works so that their new home would have a different and unique look. Ultimately, despite the absence of the banks, without assistance on the part of the state, and contrary to world practice, in the large cities of Bulgaria housing construction grew apace.

This new form of town housing construction, although based on the housing construction co-operative, avoids many of its disadvantages - the entrepreneur takes up all technical, legal and organisational obligations of the co-operative general assembly, which is always clumsy in decision making and often becomes a venue for idle talk. As the new quality of habitation requires, in many of these buildings underground parkings and garages were built, and to compensate for the inadequate until 1990 street network of shops, and to facilitate small family businesses, most of them have shops on the ground floor. Thus they are a modern version of the trade-residential buildings of the early 20th century.

After November 10, 1989, major changes took place in the villages too. Co-operative farms were liquidated and the land was restituted to its former owners. Some of them, for the same reasons as mentioned before, sold it and bought dwellings for their children in town. Others, owing to the closing down of many state-owned enterprises and unable to find employment in town, went back to the villages and started cultivating their restituted land.



Thus part of the deserted rural housing came in use again. Today many rural houses, particularly in the zones close to town, acquire new life, as an increasing number of town businessmen buy them for villas, to find tranquillity in the weekends after a hard and tense week in the noisy city.

There are people, and this group will grow in future, who invested money and bought up or rented large areas of arable land, setting the beginning

of modern large-scale agriculture and cattle-breeding. These people very soon experienced new needs and to meet them, with their substantial resources, they started new large-scale housing construction in the villages. Thus the first modern farms appeared, where the quality of habitation is equal to, and in many respects better than in the best town dwellings.





A purely Bulgarian phenomenon was again manifested in recent years in seaside resort settlements and the building entrepreneurs quickly caught it. Again contrary to the logic of Europeans or Americans, the Bulgarian, provided he can afford it, of course, started buying dwellings at the seaside or up in the mountains. Instead of “wasting” money on hotels, he prefers to buy himself a “rest nest”. To use it only one month in the year.

The result is of great social consequence – settlements suitable for family holidays, like St. Vlas, for example, situated in the proximity of the large resorts but remaining outside the interests of the big tour operator companies, experienced a great impetus in construction and town development.





*"Bros Dinev" resort
settlement, St. Vlas*

Instead of afterword

Today, at the first opportunity, i.e. as soon as he gets the required funds and without necessarily having such needs the Bulgarian undertakes the construction of large and not always justifiable monumental houses. A typical example of this are the rapidly built up new residential quarters in the environs of the large cities, especially Sofia. Good-looking with their diversified geometry and expensive materials, often with bizarre shape and unclear interior content, but invariably different from the surrounding houses, these houses bear the mark of a new epoch.

But if you look closely, you will easily discern the same age-old thirst of the Bulgarian to build his own home, according to his needs and above all according to his resources, and that the high unapproachable fences hide the same old desire his house to be a stronghold for his hearth!

Contents

Why the Bulgarian, despite his traditional poorness, has always pinched and scraped to build himself a house, as solid and as durable as possible

3

Bulgarian architecture until the 14th c.

4

The ancient Thracians

5

The Slavs

6

The Bulgarians and Great Bulgaria

7

Khan Asparuh and foundation of the First Bulgarian State

9

Bulgaria under Byzantine domination

11

Second Bulgarian State

12

Bulgarian architecture after the 14th c.

16

Bulgaria under Ottoman domination

17

The Bulgarian National Revival Period (18th – mid-19th c.)

27

Bulgaria after the Liberation to the Second World War

37

Housing construction between 1944 and 1990

41

Contemporary trends after 1990

46

Instead of afterword

51



BULGARIAN DIPLOMATIC REVIEW

EDITORIAL BOARD

Maya Nyagholova
Iva Nikolova
Prof. Dr. Todor Shopov
Simeon Vassilev
Stoyan Raichevsky

Editor-in-Chief
Julliana Tomova

Editor
Vassilka Shishkova
Graphic Design
Konstantin Radoslavov

Translation
Maya Pencheva

Desktop Publishing
Galya Gerassimova

BULGARIAN DIPLOMATIC REVIEW
is an edition of Bulgarian Bestseller
Company – National Museum of the
Bulgarian Book and Poligraphy

Editorial and Advertising Office
Sofia 1700 Vitosha Residential District
Emanuil Popdimitrov Str. bl.1 entr. B apt.11
Tel. 962 59 46, 62 21 08
Fax 962 57 64
e-mail: diplomatic@abv.bg
www.diplomatic-bg.com

